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Friends of Baxter State Park is a 501(c)(3) organization working to preserve, support, and enhance the wilderness character of Baxter State Park in the spirit of its founder, Percival P. Baxter.

October 6, 2016

Katahdin Woods & Waters National Monument
Attn: Tim Hudson, Superintendent
PO Box 446
Patten, ME 04765

Dear Tim:

On behalf of our Board of Directors, staff, and more than 1,000 members around the world, welcome to the Katahdin region! We look forward to working with you and your staff over the coming years as the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument (KWWNM) takes shape.

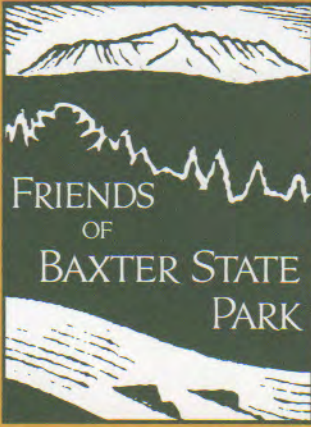
Friends of Baxter State Park (FBSP) has been carefully following conservation efforts on the KWWNM lands for more than 12 years. In late 2004, our Board recognized that permanent conservation of these lands could provide an important ecological buffer for Baxter State Park (BSP). In 2011, FBSP was the first conservation organization in Maine to expressly support a feasibility study for a national park on the EPI lands. In 2014, FBSP sent letters to the Maine congressional delegation reaffirming our support for conservation of these lands, and in 2016 we expressly supported the creation of a national monument.

As you begin the management planning process, we would like to share some ideas and issues that are important to our organization. We provide these as a starting point for discussion and to identify areas that need detailed consideration during the management planning process. FBSP requests the opportunity to serve on the advisory committee for the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

Wildlife

The border between BSP and KWWNM is a human construct – there is no border from an ecological perspective. Many species of wildlife move freely across the border and will continue to do so. We encourage KWWNM to protect wildlife from the impacts of visitor use, consistent with protections in the sanctuary areas of BSP whenever possible. Taken together, BSP and KWWNM contain nearly 300,000 acres, and could offer a vast amount of forest interior for species that depend upon large, unfragmented blocks of habitat. Road density, vehicle speed limits, pets, and visitor rules related to wildlife harassment are all relevant management issues from a wildlife perspective.

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- Governor Percival Baxter



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Invasive Species

We encourage KWWNM to use the best available scientific data to identify and manage species that should be considered invasive and establish policies to limit the ecological threat posed by invasive species. In particular, we support policies that:

- Prohibit the introduction of invasive plants and animals onto KWWNM.
- Prohibit fishing with live bait on water bodies in KWWNM where native fish species would benefit from such protection.
- Prohibit the transportation of all firewood, or firewood from outside Maine, into KWWNM to limit the spread of invasive insects.
- Remove populations of invasive organisms where possible and manage others to limit their spread on KWWNM and adjacent lands.

Roads

Roads on KWWNM will have a strong impact on the visitor experience and may have significant impacts on wildlife and viewsheds. We encourage KWWNM to consider the following actions related to roads:

- Move the Katahdin Loop Road to a location farther away from Katahdin Lake and adjacent wilderness areas in BSP. The section of greatest concern to us is between mile posts #10 and #13. NPS should ensure that lands surrounding Katahdin Lake are adequately buffered from inappropriate public access and noise from roads and trails on KWWNM. We suggest that the Loop Road be located at least 3 miles from Katahdin Lake to protect the exceptional wilderness character of this area.
- Discontinue the current parking area near Katahdin Brook, just before mile marker 12.
- Consider a shuttle bus system, similar to the one used successfully in Acadia National Park, to provide visitor transportation on the monument.
- Keep the overall road density on the monument to a minimum.

Trails

Trails are one of the most important recreational features of a protected area for visitors. Baxter State Park has a 225-mile trail system spread over 209,644 acres, or approximately 1 mile of trail for every thousand acres. Baxter State Park also maintains a number of large, trail-free zones. We recognize that potential trail connections between KWWNM and BSP will be a topic of discussion over the long term. During the initial management planning process, however, we encourage KWWNM to avoid constructing trails, trailheads, or parking areas that would encourage hikers to cross the BSP boundary, particularly near Katahdin Lake and in areas where BSP maintains trail-free zones. We also urge you to consider relocating the International Appalachian Trail and the trail to Barnard Mountain to a route off the road and farther from the BSP boundary.

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Climate Change

We encourage KWWNM to coordinate with BSP on climate change monitoring, adaptation, and mitigation when appropriate. FBSP is preparing to launch a major, two-year study of climate change in BSP and Maine's western mountains. We would welcome the participation of KWWNM in this effort, and invite the National Park Service to join as a partner in this study.

Water Management

The dam on the East Branch of the Penobscot, located at the outlet of Grand Lake Matagamon, impacts the hydrology of a large section of the East Branch of the Penobscot, including large areas in BSP and KWWNM. We recognize that this dam is privately owned, and is not under the control of either BSP or KWWNM. The management of this dam is very important to both, however, as well as to the Penobscot Nation. We encourage KWWNM to carefully consider the ownership, maintenance, and long-term management of this dam, and its role in the recreational and ecological values of the East Branch watershed.

Scenic and Viewshed Impacts

Maintaining scenic quality and viewsheds is critical to both BSP and KWWNM. With a long, shared boundary, and a substantial elevation gradient, visitors to both BSP and KWWNM will spend a great deal of time looking across the border onto neighboring lands. We recognize that KWWNM visitors want beautiful views of Katahdin, and that hikers on Katahdin want beautiful views of surrounding wilderness. We encourage KWWNM to avoid constructing buildings, roads, parking areas, and other infrastructure that would adversely impact views from BSP, especially from Katahdin and other mountain summits. We also encourage KWWNM to avoid night lighting that would diminish the exceptional dark skies in the region.

Fire

BSP has a detailed Fire Management Plan that views fire as an integral part of the Park's forested ecosystems. We encourage KWWNM to review this fire plan, and to carefully consider its implications for your management planning. BSP currently employs a wildland fire suppression management strategy on about 59% of the Park, and a wildland fire use strategy on about 41% of the Park. We encourage KWWNM to establish working partnerships with both BSP and the Maine Forest Service, and to coordinate fire management whenever possible.

Infrastructure

We encourage KWWNM to focus new infrastructure development – including buildings such as visitor centers – in local communities, rather than on the monument itself. We believe this approach will have considerable ecological and economic benefits.

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Regional Land Use Planning

We encourage KWWNM to support regional land use planning efforts by gateway communities, and to carefully consider the impact that roads and other infrastructure will have on patterns of human activity outside the monument boundary. We believe a thoughtful approach will help to ensure that the benefits of economic development are optimized to preserve the quality of life and rural character of the Katahdin region.

Cooperation and Planning

We encourage ongoing communication and cooperation between Baxter State Park, the National Park Service, and Friends of Baxter State Park. A trusting, positive working relationship will be beneficial to all parties. Katahdin is part of the name of the monument, and part of the identity of the region. The success of the monument will hinge largely on the quality of its relationships with surrounding communities, and its relationship with Baxter State Park. FBSP is committed to playing a constructive role in the development of positive relationships and in the management planning process over the long term.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments. We look forward very much to working with you over the coming years. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Aaron Megquier
Executive Director

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